

Director's Remarks, August 2010

Performance

The computer outage in July took down our web page and computer operations for about a week. The worst effect was a reduction in web activity of about 36% (from 712.36 megabytes of data transferred in July last year to 457.40 megabytes in July this year). Though we continued to manually check out materials during the outage, our services were very limited. Under the circumstances, our small decline in circulations of 6.8% (89,205 in July 2009 compared to 83,708 in July 2010) suggests that we will continue to prosper in normal months.

Automation & Elevators

The City and County chose not to award any capital funds to the Library. As previously reviewed with the board, we need to proceed with a partial upgrade of our automation system with reserve funds in order to prevent a long-term outage and to save costs on a replacement computer. We were informed three years ago that parts were no longer being made for our main computer. This year, we received a letter from Hewlett-Packard (a copy of the letter is attached) informing us that they would not provide repairs after January 1, 2011.

Other than a radical improvement in service options for our patrons & staff, the main reason we are moving forward with automation is to avoid spending the whole cost (about \$300,000) of a new automation system on a replacement computer that newer automation systems do not require. As newer systems operate on computers costing about \$50,000, spending this money now for a partial upgrade both guarantees that we can stay in operation under an effective warranty, saves about \$250,000 & months of downtime, and gives us both a new main computer and a quality automation system. We can then afford to wait for the greater efficiencies of new equipment for this system with a later capital request (approximately \$500,000 for printers, self-check machines, etc.).

A key element in covering our costs with existing funds is cannibalizing the annual maintenance contract from our current vendor (about \$100,000) This contract comes due in October as an annual prepayment, unless we provide notice 90 days in advance. After discussing the maintenance contract and our need to move forward with Daisy Madison and Mike McMahan, Daisy strongly suggested that we proceed with an RFP for automation and not wait for assurance of capital funding. Mike McMahan advised us to provide the 90 day notice and negotiate a quarterly renewal with our current vendor. We have followed his advice. We expect to be able to cover the remainder of the cost with Free Public Library and Reserve funds.

At least one elevator has been out of service every day for the last three months, but both are still covered by a City maintenance contract. The firm holding the contract said that they would go to Danny Thompson with the City because they were unable to get parts, but have not done so yet. If they do so and the City agrees, I think it is much more likely the City and County would provide emergency funding as we would be out of compliance with the American Disabilities Act without elevator service.

Brainerd

The last word we have had from Danny Thornton, who controls both our Eastgate lease and the old postal services building, is that the City will gut the structure but does not have the funding in place to renovate it. He also noted that no meeting with us was planned until late in August. He did supply a drawing of the old structure which is a L-shaped building with limited parking on three sides. His assumption was that Carol Berz would choose the section of the building fronting on the Eastgate loop road for a museum. This portion has public and staff spaces and restrooms. However, the D.A.R. spoke more about a passive set of markers than a staffed museum of antiquities.

The back part of the L had no facilities and a main entrance fronting on the small southeast parking lot. If the Library was expected to use this back section and handle double the space with the existing staff, the service desk would have to be directly across from the entrance in order to provide both reasonable security and useful service. In such a scenario, the museum portion would have to be separately staffed with a dividing wall between the two operations.

The original vision for the Brainerd development completely disregarded the higher operational and building costs. The goal of the Eastgate Library Action committee was to imagine the best possible answer for quality library service. That included 20-25 thousand sq. ft. and all the resources of an independent library in a building designed specifically for library service.

Facilities Master Plan & New Strategic Plan (Board approval requested)

Bob McNulty from the Partners for Livable Communities spent about 5 hours on Wednesday, May 5 touring Brainerd and our downtown building with a City/Library Task Force/River City delegation. Their primary focus was on visioning statements for the Brainerd development (David Barlew/Artech) and the downtown library (Professor Joshua Emig from Auburn). It is not in the best interest of the Library to be passive recipients as opposed to active participants in a plan for any future system.

Can we now join forces with the Regional Planning Agency and local governments to build a master plan for development? The City and County will spend the next fiscal year deciding our fate (renegotiating the sales tax agreement expiring in May 2011) based on where they think we ought to be headed. It seems in our best interest to work with them on a sustainable future, one based on available sources for funding. Without such a plan, we risk alienating communities like Soddy-Daisy that need a branch library, but also isolation from politically popular but poorly planned alternatives (e.g. Signal Mountain & East Ridge). The Brainerd community is building momentum for a new branch, but has a very nebulous sense of optimal placement and size. Several representing Soddy-Daisy have expressed frustration with our failure to offer a concrete plan for their area. Recent designs for a new downtown library by a group of Auburn graduate students raise questions about what we are doing to fix our problems downtown.

The Library Taskforce established a two-year strategic plan that will expire at the end of June 2011. We will need to begin planning the budget for the following year (FY2012) in about eight months. We have new data from national and local surveys of library patrons. Can we begin setting up a strategic planning effort with Karen McMahon and the Library Taskforce or on our own?

Reorganization Downtown (board advice requested)

Though carpeting was approved, the winning vendor has not been able to provide suitable carpeting in a timely fashion and is not expecting installation to begin until the beginning of September. We will need all the staff we have to shift and label materials on the second floor prior to our annual fundraiser in October. Under the circumstances, all our plans about moving staff and increasing hours in the branches have been put on hold until that job is complete.

The Community Foundation rejected our application for \$20,000 because it had twice the requests for help than they had money to cover and needed to focus on basic needs. They recommended that we reapply in September. Our hope was to combine the Free Public Library and Community Foundation funds in a match request to the Kresge Foundation. In that the carpet has been delayed, the Free Public Library Fund is still intact. Should we wait until September to apply to Kresge in hope that the Community Foundation will support our resubmitted request?